



# READING GUIDE

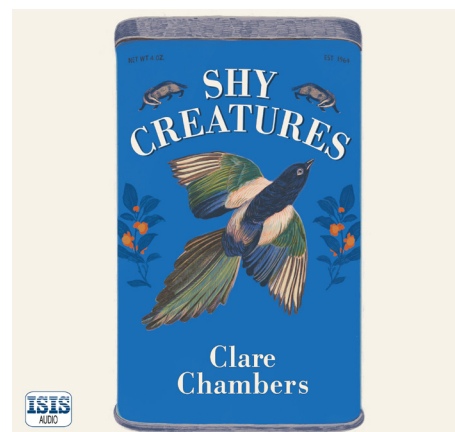
September, 2025

## Shy Creatures

Clare Chambers

### Synopsis

In all failed relationships there is a point that passes unnoticed at the time, which can later be identified as the beginning of the decline. For Helen it was the weekend that the Hidden Man came to Westbury Park. Croydon, 1964. Helen Hansford is in her thirties and an art therapist in a psychiatric hospital where she has been having a long love affair with Gil: a charismatic, married doctor. One spring afternoon they receive a call about a disturbance from a derelict house not far from Helen's home. A thirty-seven-year-old man called William Tapping, with a beard down to his waist, has been discovered along with his elderly aunt. It is clear he has been shut up in the house for decades, but when it emerges that William is a talented artist, Helen is determined to discover his story.



### Discussion points

1. How does Helen Hansford's character develop throughout the novel? What are her key motivations, and how do they influence her decisions?
2. The novel explores various forms of confinement—physical, emotional, and societal. How do these themes manifest in the lives of the characters, particularly William Tapping?
3. How does the historical context of the 1960s influence the characters' experiences, especially regarding mental health and societal expectations?
4. Did you enjoy the ending?

### Next, you should listen to...

*Small Pleasures* by Clare Chambers

*The Burning Stones* by Antti Tuomainen

*Friends Of Dorothy* by Sandi Toksvig